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UNCLAS KUWAIT 001016

SIPDIS

FOR NEA/ARPI BERNIS

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SUBJECT: KUWAITI ELECTORATE TO JUMP 160% IF WOMEN VOTE;  
POLL SHOWS PUBLIC SUPPORT

REF: KUWAIT 944

1. If the National Assembly grants Kuwaiti women the right to vote, women will become a vital political constituency as they will constitute 61% of eligible voters. The overall electorate will more than double to 39% of the total citizen population (cited as 956,000) from 15% today. According to Al-Shall Economic Consultants, in a report summarized in an English-language newspaper March 13, the number of potential voters would increase to 372,000 from the current base of 143,000, which represents Kuwaiti men at least 21 years of age who do not serve in the military or any security service. The military exclusion disqualifies 29% of male voters. (Note: The electorate numbers represent the total eligible voters but not necessarily the number of people who will register to vote or ultimately cast a ballot. End note.) Women outnumber men in the 21 category by 26,000. All figures are based on CY 2004 statistics.

2. The newspaper also reported that a government-sponsored poll revealed that 51% of Kuwaitis support full political rights for women while 29% oppose the idea. Were women only allowed to vote but not seek elected office, the level of support jumps to 71%. The poll, conducted in conjunction with Kuwait University, was based on a random sample of 2,000 Kuwaiti men and women.

3. Comment: Women's voting rights remains a hot topic in the press and during diwaniya visits. Opinions heard from contacts jibe with the opinion poll in that people believe the women's suffrage bill will pass, but narrowly. End comment.  
LEBARON